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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 002421

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S CARSON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PTER](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - MULTI-FACTIONAL ASWJ APPEARS
INCREASINGLY COHESIVE

Classified By: Somalia Unit Counselor Bob Patterson; reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The multi-factional Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ) in late November appeared increasingly cohesive, as ASWJ leaders from several regions began to more actively collaborate. ASWJ leaders from the regions of Galgaduud, Hiraan, Middle Juba, Somaliland as well as the diaspora told Somalia Unit Poloff that they were organizing mini-conferences in their regions. Sheikh Omar, leader of the militarily powerful north Galgaduud faction of ASWJ, said he was communicating with Hiraan and Gedo ASWJ leaders and soon intended to hold an ASWJ conference in Galgaduud. We think that increasing ASWJ cohesion and collaboration is a positive but potentially risky development. Internal ASWJ cooperation may lead to greater gains against al-Shabaab. However, an emboldened ASWJ movement that is not connected to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) could risk broadening the conflict in Somalia. We are urging the TFG to more aggressively reach out to its potential ASWJ allies and encouraging ASWJ to focus its unhappiness on al-Shabaab, and not on other, more religiously conservative groups that are themselves opposed to the strain of Islam that al-Shabaab is violently introducing to Somalia. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During late November meetings with Somalia Unit Poloff, ASWJ leaders from multiple regions in Somalia said that they were increasingly cooperating with one other. ASWJ leaders from the regions of Galgaduud, Hiraan, Middle Juba, Somaliland and from the diaspora told Somalia Unit Poloff that they were organizing mini-conferences in their regions that would culminate, they hoped, in an organization-wide ASWJ conference. ASWJ leaders agreed that the north Galgaduud region should be the center of ASWJ and that the various ASWJ groups needed to forge a common policy and military strategy. (Note: The suggestion by a cross-section of ASWJ leaders that ASWJ be based in Galgaduud is a welcome development. The north Galgaduud faction of ASWJ has been the most militarily active faction of ASWJ and, as such, has been resented by many other non-military ASWJ leaders. ASWJ in much of Somalia exists only as a system of shared spiritual principles. End note.)

¶3. (C) Sheikh Omar, leader of the militarily powerful north Galgaduud faction of ASWJ, on November 30 told Somalia Unit Poloff that he had communicated with Hiraan and Gedo region ASWJ leaders and soon intended to hold a conference in Galgaduud. Other contacts told us that the purpose of the Galgaduud conference was to increase collaboration among ASWJ groups, to develop a military strategy, and to agree on the principle of non-interference by "opportunistic politicians." Sheikh Omar told us that his goals were not political and

that ASWJ was willing to work with the TFG. (Note: ASWJ leaders, however, regularly refer to many TFG leaders as "Wahabis" and claim that the TFG is widely infiltrated by al-Shabaab. End note.)

¶4. (C) Omar said that, despite rumors to the contrary, he had not reached an agreement to integrate his forces with the TFG. Omar said he was unaware that such an agreement had been reached between the TFG and any faction of ASWJ. (Note: President Sharif's Chief-of-Staff Abdikareem Jama in late November told us that the TFG had recently reached an agreement with ASWJ in which unspecified ASWJ forces would be integrated with TFG forces. End note.)

¶5. (C) Many ASWJ leaders in November collectively condemned a comment by President Sharif that likened ASWJ to Hisbul Islam. Although the TFG insisted that Sharif had been misquoted, many ASWJ leaders saw in his comment confirmation of their suspicion that Sharif is fundamentally anti-ASWJ.

¶6. (C) Comment: We believe that increasing ASWJ cohesion and collaboration is a positive but potentially risky development. Increased cooperation by ASWJ's regional leadership may produce greater gains against al-Shabaab. However, an emboldened ASWJ movement not connected to the TFG risks adding another contender to the conflict in Somalia. We continue to urge the TFG to more aggressively court ASWJ. In addition, ASWJ clearly views itself as an "anti-Wahabi" movement and as its fight continues to move from the mosque to the battlefield, it could potentially end up fighting, instead of making common cause with, more religiously

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conservative groups such as Ras Kamboni, Anole and the former Islamic Courts militia that are themselves opposed to al-Shabaab. In recent conversations, we have been urging ASWJ to focus its unhappiness exclusively on the central threat to traditional Somali culture: al-Shabaab, instead of harboring suspicions about the beliefs of Sheikh Sharif's inner circle and other al-Shabaab opponents.

RANNEBERGER